**Lecture 5**

**Learner Autonomy**

So welcome everybody to this lecture today. Um, as you know, um ... and as has—as has been advertised, the topic is ‘Becoming an independent learner’. Just a couple of points of housekeeping, um... I’ll, make these slides available to you. Um, I’ll send you ... um ... an electronic version of these. So ... um ... you feel free to make—please feel free to make notes but you will also receive a copy of these ... um ... electronically. Um, also ... um ... one other point, if you don’t mind I’d like to take ... uh ... wait and take questions all at the end if that’s ok.

So ... um ... my first slide shows you ... um ... three phrases. And I just wanted to just talk ... uh ... very briefly about these because these are phrases that I’ll be— I will be using today and I just wanted to explain a little bit more about them.

So the topic— the topic of the lecture is how to— how to become an ‘independent learner’. Another term that you might hear is something called ‘learner autonomy’. Basically, that means that the learner is becoming more autonomous ... um ... it’s another word for independent as well, so more able to study and work on their own.

The third term that I’ve put up on the slide is ‘learner training’. This is another term for what we’re talking about today. So training yourself to become a better learner. So those are the three general terms that you will hear in reference to this topic.

Becoming an independent learner involves raising your awareness of the learning strat— strategies that are available to you so that ultimately you become a more effective and more autonomous learner. The idea is that learners take on more responsibility for their own learning and, therefore, they become more effective learners. So, longer term, the goals are that learners take on more responsibility for their own learner— own learning, and they, therefore, become more effective learners.

As Barbera Mcv— Devitt, whose work we will be discussing later on in the lecture, as she states, ‘The end product of all education should be an independent learner’. And the benefits of learner training are that learning can be more effective when learners take control of their own learning because they learn what they are ready to learn. Those learners who’re responsible for their own learning can carry on learning outside the classroom, which obviously is really important. They don’t just rely on what the lecturer is telling them, they go on and they— they study research outside the classroom. And learners who know about learning can transfer these same learning strategies to other subjects.

So thes— the— the last, ... um ... three points that I’ve made, these benefits, these ... um ... are all mentioned in ... um ... Ellis and Sinclair’s work. Their seminal book which is called ‘Learning to Learn English’. So these— those three points come from that and I rec— highly recommend this book. Learners learn more when the course they are following takes their own objectives and interests into account. Focusing on these during a course helps learners focus on which parts of the course particularly meet their needs and interests. They may have never thought of this before.

A tried and tested method for getting students to think about this and also to enable st— teachers to collect information on students’ skills is to do a needs analysis. Basically, this means analysing your needs. This makes the learners focus on their reasons for learning. Traditionally, needs analysis— needs analyses are done through questionnaires. However, Jim Sc— Scrivener, in his book ‘Learning Teaching’ which he wrote in 2005, he provides a large number of different ways in which to do a lee—needs analysis, either through writing, speaking or observation. And I’m going to talk a little more about these now.

So through writing, as learners you might be asked to fill in a questionnaire, that’s what we’ve just talked about, that’s one of the more traditional methods. Choose the best answer from a selection; you might be asked to do gap fill sentences, for example, in class I particularly enjoy working on ‘dot dot dot’ fill in the gap. You might be asked to delete the things which are not true for you. Or you might be asked to write a paragraph about topics set by the teacher or write a letter, an email or a note to your teacher. Or as a homework essay, you might be asked to write about what you want to learn and why. So those are some methods using ... um ... writing.

The next area we are going to talk about is speaking. So, your teacher might interview you individually or in pairs. He or she might plan activities to focus learners, yourselves, on specific issues which will lead to discussions. Your teacher might ask you to select and reject items from a menu or a set of cards discussing the reasons with— with you and the teacher and with each other, or the teacher might ask informally for advice about what would be useful to work on in the next lesson. The teacher might collect oral or, again written feedback comments, or show the intended coursebook for the course and discuss it together with you. Or, the teacher might get learners to help plan the course the week, or the next lesson. Or more informally, the teacher might organise a social event at which informal discussions on need arise.

And thirdly, observation; teachers might, for example, set students tasks to do in class that allow the teacher to observe you working. And this will give the teacher a chance to diagnose your skills and discover more about what you need. Alternatively, the teacher will ask you to bring in samples of the material that you’re dealing with in your other course. So you‘re— if you’re in a pre-sessional or in-sessional English class, they might ask you what you using and studying in your actual course and to bring those along and have a look at those. Or what you might, if you’re in a pre-sessional, what you might be expected to—to be able to read, digest, understand in the future.

Once you’ve started thinking about your goals, how do you keep these goals at the forefront of your mind? One way of doing this is through learner diaries, so the suggestion is that after you’ve done the needs analysis, you set yourself some of your— some goals and these have to be specific to you so sometimes we say set yourself some smart goals so S M A R T. So the ‘S’ stands for ‘specific’, the ‘M’ stands for ‘measurable’, the ‘A’ stands for ‘achievable’, the ‘R’ stands for ‘realistic’ and the ‘T’ stands for ‘timely’. So that’s what you need to do; you need to set yourself some goals after you’ve done your needs analysis, and then you‘d keep track of these goals by writing in a diary, a learner diary. And these are periodically reviewed by yourself, and also your teacher might get involved and ... um ... yes, just remember that th—these, ... um ... need to be achievable goals. Don’t set yourself something that’s unrealistic. And review them regularly. If you find that you’ve not achieved your goal, then you need to reassess whether that goal was re—realistic or not. And if it wasn’t realistic then you need to think about changing your— your goals.

Sometimes on a course, learners are given the opportunity to determine the content of the course. So to have a—a—a quite a big impact on the content of the course it’s not always possible, but occasionally sometimes this happens and this is called ‘syllabus negotiation’. Basically what it involves is that the teacher will go through the syllabus, that is— go— that you’re going to be working on, working towards for that period of time, that term, that semester, and the teacher will go through and say to you: this is negotiable; this is non-negotiable, so we definitely need to do these parts; we can’t negotiate these, these are non-negotiable; these parts, we can do either this or that. So, that’s what syllabus negotiation is about. Often the teacher will start off small, so give you small choices, and then as you get used to—as—as you–you get used to this as a group, because often it has, it can’t just be one person deciding it, it’s usually democratic decision as a group. As you get used to it and the group becomes more cohesive, as in you start to ... uh ... identify more what as a group you would like to learn, then—then the teacher expands it ... um ... so they—the teacher starts off small then he or she expands it as the group becomes more cohesive.

McDevitt ... uh ... I— I mentioned her before, sounds a word of caution about syllabus negotiation in her article called ‘Negotiating a syllabus: a win win set—situation, question mark.’ So, basically she’s asking the question, ‘is it a win-win situation?’ And what she mentions, ... um ... this is how she sounds a word of caution; she says that some students may not be comfortable with syllabus negotiation. And this is what she says, ‘Learners in many parts of the world are often uneasy with the notion of negotiation, seeing it as a sign of weakness--weakness on the part of teachers’. If you recognize this in yourself, and you know yourself that you would ... um ... initially not be—feel that comfortable with syllabus negotiation, try and keep an open mind and try and have a go because it’s a just a different way of looking at things. So, if you recognize what McDevitt says in yourself, then try to keep an open mind about syl—syllabus negotiation.

To become better learners it’s also important to reflect on the learning process itself and to draw attention to the processes involved. Much work has been done on learning styles and trying to identify your learning style or learning styles. Perhaps the most famous questionnaire and labelling system is Honey and Mumford’s and … um … uh … they use the labelling systems, activist, reflector, theorist and pragmatist amongst others. There are other labelling systems which … um … I have lif— listed here. Basically, the way it works is that you— you— you fill out a questionnaire and it is identified— … uh … what is identified is, how you like to learn, how you like to absorb information. And there are various versions but Honey and Mumford is probably the most famous.

More recently, Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences has become influential in this field. So in Howard Gardner’s theory, everyone is intelligent in different ways, which will affect how they learn. And he’s identified seven intelligences: musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal. So you’ll see these on the— these seven on the next slide. So … um … you know— I— I’m— I won’t go through and read each of these out to you but in your own time please feel free to look into these more. Um, Howard Gardner has also— although he has identified these seven intelligences, he’s also open to the possibility that there may be more.

So … um … on this slide you can see the seven intelligences that Howard Gardner has identified. So I’ll quickly … um … run through some of these. The first one, interpersonal, in the top right corner, is about sensitivity the moo— to the moods and feelings of others and it enables us to work with others and listen effectively. So you might find that you … um … this is one of the … um … intelligences that you feel that you have. The next one is musi— musical: the ability to perceive, appreciate and produce rhythm and pitch. It means you have a good ear and you are able to re— reproduce a tune. Spatial: a three dimensional, relational sense which enables us to perceive the worl— the visual world accur— accurately. It enables thinking in pictures, seeing things in relationship to others. Intrapersonal is self-knowledge and understanding of our own feelings, allows us to reflect on our own— on our experiences and learn from them. Linguistic, you have sensitivity to sounds, rhythms and meanings of words and to language. Logical-mathematical, you have the ability to recognize numerical or Iogical patterns and to sort and analyse. And finally, bodily-kinaesthetic. This is— this is talking about the control of body movements and the capacity to handle objects skillfully. It ena— enables us to express ourselves physically and play games.

Um, while I’ve just gone through these seven, Howard Gardner has also said that … um … he is also open to the possibility that there may be more. There may be for example, the naturalist intelligent— intelligence— the naturalist intelligence. So for example, this would be the capacity to organize and categorize natural— the natural world. For example, plants, spe— plants or … um … insects into different species. So that’s a— another possibility.

Throughout your courses, please try and reflect on the purpose of every activity you do. Think about the activity before you are about to do it, during you’re doing the activity and afterwards. If you think about the purpose, this will help make the benefits of every activity that you do more apparent.

In conclusion, learner autonomy is grounded in cooperation and collaboration. It’s formed through some of the techniques we’ve talked about today, such as needs analysis and discovering your learning styles. Incorporating some or a— or— or all of these techniques in your learning will increase your self-awareness so that you become better, more effective learners.

Thank you very much for listening and as you’ll see from my final slide, this is the bibliography with referenches—references to the ... um ... articles and books that I’ve talked about and referenced in my lecture. Thank you very much.